

CHRISTMAS DAY - The Divine Parabola

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, I'll lead us in prayer, so let's pray. Father, we do pray today that you'd help us to understand this passage, to recapture some of the glory of Christmas and of what you have done in your Son.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, I thought I'd start this Bible talk for today with some reflections on fame and what it means to be famous.

You see, I think there are a number of ways in which you can become famous as a person. And to demonstrate, I'm going to show you some pictures of three people on the data projector. So keep an eye on them, and we'll have the first.

Second one. Third one. Now, before we flip onto that, now some of you may not recognise this man, but the next slide will show you just who he is.

Now, we'll go back to the start, and I want you to think, what makes this person famous as we go?

Now, when you think about it, think about Queen Elizabeth I.

[1 : 13] Well, no, the second in this case. But think about her first. She inherited fame in some ways, didn't she? Now, she's then made her own fame, but she, in some sense, inherited fame.

She was born into it. She had very little choice about it. Now, what about the second slide? Well, he made fame, didn't he? That is Sachin Tendulkar.

He is a great cricket player. The Indians regard him as, you know, a god of cricket. He is one of the greatest batsmen of all time. But now let's turn to the third slide. The third slide, of course, is of Ned Kelly.

And in his own lifetime, Ned Kelly was, I'm told, a fairly obscure Australian outlaw. However, after he died, his exploits became famous. He gradually became more and more famous, so much so that, you know, this year when they finally found his skull, they, you know, there was great fanfare, and they identified it with DNA and so on, and his family were able to bury him properly.

Anyway, he became exalted to fame, largely because of his associations and the legends that surrounded him. So there's three criteria for fame. You can be famous because it comes with your identity as a person, or you can be famous because you do something of great worth, or you can be famous because people exalt you to fame for one reason or another.

[2 : 41] Now, today, I want to examine the person of Jesus, and I think Jesus is famous for all three reasons. That is, he's famous because of who he is, because of his identity.

He is famous because of what he has done, and he is famous because God has declared him to have fame. He has exalted him, as it were.

Now, in order to do this, I've chosen the passage we've read today, so you might like to find that little buff-coloured sheet, Philippians chapter 2, and I want to tell you just a bit about this passage.

It's a very special passage. It probably was an ancient hymn or poem that existed in the first century that first-century Christians had written. Perhaps even Paul himself, the apostle, had written it.

We don't know, but it tells us lots about Jesus. It is a hymn or a poem about Jesus. It tells us who he is, it tells us what he did, and it tells us what God thinks of him and what he thinks we should do with him.

[3 : 42] So let's have a look at it, and I don't know whether the parabola is better or the swing. I suspect the swing works really well as well. So, you know, Ruth stolen a little bit of my thunder, but that's okay.

I want you to have a look at this hymn. It starts with Jesus in heaven, doesn't it? It tells us who Jesus was or who he is, and this hymn then goes on to tell us what he did, and it describes how he descended to earth.

Then it says how he ascends back to heaven, and God exalts him. The actions of the hymn therefore form a divine parabola. Jesus in heaven, Jesus on earth, Jesus back in heaven again. What I want to do is just take a closer look at that for a brief moment. These three snapshots of Jesus give us the full picture of Jesus. They tell us why Jesus is so famous and why today people all across the world are meeting together to remember his birth.

It tells us why Jesus is worthy of worship. They give a full picture of the Jesus we should worship at Christmas. So let's have a look at the first snapshot at the beginning of the parabola.

[4 : 53] Let's turn and see who Jesus was before Christmas. Well, verse five tells us that the Jesus we see in a stable at Christmas is really God.

Originally, before he existed on earth, before he came to earth, this Jesus, we are told, was in the form of God.

This Jesus was God before all time. He shared the divine splendor. He was the image of God, the exact likeness or representation of God.

He had equality with God. And because he was God, he had every right to be regarded as God, every right to be regarded as equal to God, every right to assert his divine status.

But he did not. He refused to seize hold of that which was his by right. Instead, he chose another path. He chose to be humiliated, to be born a human being, to become a child, to become a dependent child, to become dependent on another human being or group of human beings.

[6 : 01] This God from all eternity chose to enter the world of crying to be fed, of wet nappies or whatever the first century equivalent was, of dependent helplessness.

The God of all the universe chose to become like us. This is the Jesus of Christmas, God in the shape of a baby, God in the shape of a human being, God humbling himself, emptying himself off his rights, laying aside his splendor, accepting humble conditions, accepting obscurity.

This is the Jesus of Christmas. And that brings us to snapshot two. You see, when Jesus humbled himself by becoming a human being, he put himself under God, his father.

He put himself where every other human being finds themselves, under the rule of God. And when Jesus was in this position, he did what no human being before him and no human being after him has been able to do consistently.

He became God's servant. He obeyed God. And what's more, his obedience to his father went to the very extreme. He obeyed God, we're told in this passage, to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[7 : 23] He allowed the greatest humiliation of all. Look at verses six to eight. The grand, who being in very nature, God, did not consider equality with God, something to be grasped, but made himself nothing.

Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

You see, Jesus reaches the very bottom of the parabola, doesn't he? God humbled, God humiliated, God dying on a cross at the hands of his creatures.

The crucified God, if you like. This is the true Jesus, the Jesus of Christmas, a Jesus born to die.

Friends, some children are born with, we could say, a silver spoon in their mouths.

But this child, born at Christmas, is born with a foot in the grave. This is the Jesus of Christmas, the once preexistent son of God, now the humiliated servant.

[8 : 38] And with that, we come to snapshot number three. The parabola rises again, for God the Father responds to the humiliated and obedient Jesus. He exalts his son, and he crowns him Lord of all.

God elevates his humiliated son to the place of highest honor. He installs him on a seat of power, what Jesus had refused as his right, what he'd refused to snatch out at.

God the Father now gives him, as a gift. He who became a man, who was crucified, is now worshipped and glorified, as Lord and God.

His mission is accomplished. Adam's deed has been undone. Our sin has been atoned for. And the result, a return to friendship with God, for us. This is the exalted Lord Jesus, the real Jesus, the one that we encounter and remember this Christmas.

Look at those final verses with me. Verse 9 through to 11. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess, that

Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[10:01] So there we have it. The Jesus of Christmas, is the Jesus who is famed for many things. He is famous because of who he was, before his human birth.

He is the preexistent son. He is famous because of what he has done. He has done what no other human being has done, and lived rightly under the rule of God. He is the humiliated servant. And he is famous because of how God, has exalted him to his right hand, in glory. He is the exalted Lord. This is the Jesus that we remember at Christmas.

He is the one we meet, in this dingy stable, lying in an animal's food trough. He is the one who sucks at his mother's breast. He is the totally dependent, and thoroughly human Jesus.

Jesus is human being like us, clothed in human God, clothed in human form. This is the Jesus of Christmas. And I want you to listen to one of the Christmas carols, as it seeks to express these ideas from Philippians 2.

[11:09] You'll know it. Christ, by highest heaven adored. Christ, the everlasting Lord. Late in time, behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb.

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see. Hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with man to dwell. Jesus, our Emmanuel.

Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace. Hail the Son of Righteousness. Light and life to all he brings. Risen with healing in his wings. Mild he lays his glory by.

Born that man no more may die. Born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give them second birth. I guess that all that remains is for us to just reflect a little bit on how we should respond to this great news.

What should our reaction be to this Jesus? Well, I think it's rather straightforward. There are two direct responses, either demanded or implied by the passage we've read. The first reaction is very straightforward.

[12:14] Bow your knees before this Jesus. You see, we should worship and serve him and confess while we can that he is our Lord. For the Bible says that the days will come when we will realize the truth of who Jesus is.

But it will be too late. For our destiny for eternity depends on how we treat Jesus now. The choice is ours. We can willingly recognize and treat him as Lord now.

Or we can wait till the day when we'll be forced to recognize him as Lord, only to be cut off from him forever. So this must be our first reaction to Jesus. To bow before him, recognize him as Lord.

Second reaction, I think, is also straightforward. We must imitate what Jesus does. You see, Jesus was humbled more than anyone has ever been. He was obedient in his state of humiliation to the furthest extent of obedience.

And in being obedient, he sets us an example. You can see it here. Look at those first five verses in Philippians 2. Paul says, If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort from his love, any fellowship with the spirit, any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete.

[13:32] By being like minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or a vain conceit, but in humility.

Consider others better than yourselves. But also, each of you should look out not only for your own interests, but also the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. And then he goes on into the illustration. These verses are clear, I think. If we believe in Jesus, if we've recognized him and received all that he has won for us, if we have fellowship with him, then we are to imitate him.

In relation to God, we should be humble and obedient. In relation to the people of God, we should be likewise. We should be humble and consider others better than ourselves.

We should look after the interests of others. We should not let strife or self-seeking or self-assertion mark our relationship with others. If we all did this around the dinner table at Christmas with our families, it would be a different place, wouldn't it?

[14:37] And in all relationships, we should be like our Lord Jesus, humble and obedient. These verses are clear. The Jesus we celebrate this Christmas is the famed Jesus.

He is the pre-existent son who chose long before time to give up his rights and become human. He is the humiliated servant of God who humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross.

He is the exalted Lord. Let's determine that we will worship him as Lord, adore him as the pre-existent son, imitate him in our life before God and in our life together. Spend our lives in obedience and service of God and his people. That's the true response to the Jesus we meet at Christmas. Let me pray.

Father, this day we thank you for your son. We thank you that he was your son from before all time. Thank you for his obedience and his choice in choosing to become human.

[15 : 51] Thank you for Jesus, the Christ. Thank you for his humiliation, even to the point of death, death on a cross. Thank you, Father, for all that he has won for us, that we might be brought back to you through his death.

Thank you for the exalted Lord Jesus who sits at your right hand in glory. Please help us to worship him and help us to be like him.

And Father, we pray these things this Christmas in Jesus name. Amen.